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AUTHOR	Lewis, Jerry M.; Sites, Paul
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ABSTRACT

This report attempts to describe empirically the decision making processes of black families. A black community in Northeastern Ohio was the subject of the study. Information was obtained from interviews with both the husband and wife of 203 families. In addition, an analysis of each subject's perception of his family's orientation is included. The Family Decision Making Scale, developed by Blood and Wolfe in "Husbands and Wives," is used to quantify results. The mean score for husbands is 6.8; and 6.7 for wives. Thus, the mean score for both husbands and wives is in a patriarchial direction. Only two percent of the husbands saw the power structure of the family as wife dominant, while 25 percent saw it as equalitarian, with the overwhelming majority, 73 percent, seeing it as husband dominant. Nearly the same is true for the wives, with the percentages being 4, 34, and 62 respectively. In conclusion, the findings show that not all black families are matriarchal as the popular sterotype holds and as some sociological studies seem to indicate, the black working-class families studied in this report being somewhat more patriarchal. [Not available in hard copy due to the marginal legibility of the original document.] (Author/JW)

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Decision Making in Black Working Class Families[1]

by

Jerry M. Lewis Paul Sites

Kent State University

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Introduction

One of the latent functions of an adequate sociology in a democratic society is that of breaking down existing stereotypes. Yet in certain areas of study, sociologists, by limiting their range of study to only certain segments of a population, not only maintain existing stereotypes but also reinforce them by hanging the scientific mantle of objective truth around their necks. No where has this been more true than in the study of the black family. By limiting the majority of their research to studies of broken lower-class black families, sociologists have perpetuated the stereotype of the black family as a matriarchal structure. There have been exceptions to this, but those studies which have gained the most popularity in the general society are guilty of perpetuating the stereotype.[2]

Very few studies have attempted to describe empirically the decision making processes of black families. For example, the best study of family decision making in general is Blood and Wolfe's Husbands and Wives and their analysis of decision making in black families is limited.[3] The research reported here uses the scale developed by Blood and Wolfe but extends their analysis in two ways. First, interviews from both husband and wife are used. Secondly an analysis of the respondent's perception of his family of orientation is included.

Procedure

The study was conducted in an all black community in Northeastern Ohio and consisted of 203 homes. This community was developed 40 years ago and has remained an isolated all black community since that time. The community is adjacent to a larger town but it has not been annexed even though land and homes around it have been. Thus this black community remains under township government without running water, sewers and other amenities seen as necessary by middle-class Americans.

The data were collected during the winter and summer of 1968. We spent several months in the community getting acquainted with the people before the actual interviewing began. In order to set up interviews every intact family in the community was contacted by a letter asking for their cooperation in the research project. Later these families were contacted either by phone or directly in order to set a time for an interview when husband and wife could both be present. The interviewing was done by three integrated teams each of which consisted of one white and one black male. Where possible, husband and wife were interviewed at the same time in a different part of the house. In order to reduce bias as much as possible the black and white interviewer on each team alternated between husband and wife as they went from home to home. The interviewing time averaged about 2½ hours and each respondent was paid $5.00 for participating in the study. A total of 52 families were contacted. In 43 families interviews were collected from both husband and wife. In addition seven wives were interviewed when the husband refused and two husbands were interviewed when the wife refused.

In order to measure the distribution of power in the family, Blood and Wolfe's Family Decision-Making Scale was used.[4] This scale consists of eight different areas of family decision making. They are: (1) What job the husband is to take, (2) What car to buy; (3) Whether or not to buy life insurance. (4) Whether to go on a vacation, (5) What house or apartment to take, (6) Whether or not the wife should go to work or quit work, (7)What doctor to have when someone is sick and (8) How much money the family should spend per week on food. For each item the respondent selects one of five responses. They are, along with their corresponding weights: (10) Husband always, (8) Husband more than wife, (6) Husband and wife exactly the same, (4) Wife more than the husband and (2) wife always. Means were computed to provide decision making scores.

Findings

Table I shows the distribution of scores for husbands and wives on the Family Decision Making Scale for their families of procreation. The mean score for husbands in 6.8 and that for wives 6.7. Thus we find that the mean score for both husbands and wives is in a patriarchal direction. If we take the score of 0-4 as wife dominant, 4.1 - 6.0 as equalitarian and 6.1 - 10.0 as husband dominant, we find that only 2 percent of the husbands see the power structure of the family as wife dominant while 25 percent see it as equalitarian with the overwhelming majority, 73 percent seeing it as husband dominant. Nearly the same is true for the wives with the percentages being 4, 34, and 62 respectively.

It is interesting to compare these results with those of the Blood and Wolfe study. The scores of our black husbands and wives are much more patriarchal than the scores of Blood and Wolfe's total sample and the reverse of their black families. They found 19 percent husband dominant and 44 percent wife dominant.[5] Thus our results for a group of working-class husbands and wives differ profoundly from the popular stereotype as well as from those of the Blood and Wolfe sample.

In an attempt to account for the distribution of scores on the Family Decision Making Scale several factors were investigated. The first of these was the possible effect of socialization in the respondents' families of orientation. In order to do this each respondent was asked to respond to the items on the Family Decision Making Scale as it would apply to his (her) family of orientation. Table II shows the distribution of scores on the Family Decision Making Scale applied to the respondents' family of orientation. Here we find that even though 4 of the husbands and 6 of the wives were raised in families with only the mother present that the average scores for both husbands and wives are still in a patriarchal direction with the mean for the husband's family of orientation being 6.9 and that for the wives being

6.1. This indicates that the mean pattern of power in the respondents' families of orientation was not radically different than the pattern of power in their families of procreation. It is interesting to note that socialization could be an influencing factor.

Another possible explanation is in relationship to resources brought to the marriage. In their study of family power Blood and Wolfe say that:

> The sources of power in so intimate a relationship as marriage must be sought in the comparative resources which the husband and wife bring to the marriage, rather than in brute force. A resource may be defined as anything that one partner may make available to the other, helping the latter satisfy his needs or attain his goals. The balance of power will be on the side of that partner who contributes the greater resources to the marriage.[6]

Among the factors considered by Blood and Wolfe were religion, age, family income, level of education and the wife's contribution to the family's income. They found that if a differential occurred in age, religion, or education, a shift in power occurred toward the marriage partner favored by the differential. They also found a shift in power toward the wife occurred if she worked outside the home and that the husband's power increased as level of family income increased. Tables III through X present data on these factors for our group of respondents. The results from our study indicate that both middle-aged husbands and wives see the family as more patriarchal than do older and younger husbands and wives (Table III). However, the differences are relatively small. In terms of age differentials (Table IV), wives see the family as more patriarchal when the husband is older but this is not reciprocated by husbands who see the family as more patriarchal, rather than matriarchal, when the wife is older. It is interesting to note that wives are willing to attribute more power to older husbands than older husbands are willing to attribute to themselves.

The actual level of education (Table V) seems to make little difference in power scores for either husbands or wives. Nor do educational level

differentials between husbands and wives affect the mean power scores of husbands (Table VI). Wives, however, are willing to attribute more power to husbands with more education than they are to themselves when they have more education.

In terms of the degree of religiousity, the 28 husbands and 24 wives who place highest on the religiousity scale (Table VII) both have an average of 7 on the Family Decision Making Scale which indicates a rather pronounced patriarchal direction. In terms of differentials on the religiousity scale (Table VIII) husbands attribute more power to themselves when they are more religious than their wives while wives attribute more power to their husbands when they are more religious than their husbands.

In terms of employment outside the home (Table IX), wives attribute more power to husbands when only the husband works outside the home than for any other category but, again, husbands do not reciprocate when only wives are employed. Both see the family as more equalitarian when both or neither are employed. It is again interesting to note that when only husbands are employed wives attribute more power to them than husbands do to themselves. Both husbands and wives attribute more power to husbands in lower income families than they do to husbands in higher income families (Table X) which is the reverse of the Blood and Wolfe findings.

Conclusions

In conclusion our findings show that not all black families are matriarchal as the popular stereotype holds and as some sociological studies seem to indicate. Indeed, the black working-class families studied are somewhat more patriarchal than the white families and much more patriarchal than the black families studied by Blood and Wolfe.

The data on differentials for the way in which wives perceive shifts in power tend to be consistent with the Blood and Wolfe study with the exception of level of family income. But this is not true for husbands.

Husbands appear to be unwilling to allow wives more power when the differential is in the wives favor. In addition, husbands appear not to see themselves as having all the power wives attribute to them when the differential is in the husbands favor. From this it would appear that an adequate study of family decision-making should include interviews with both husbands and wives since each appears to see power arrangements differently in relationship to the differentials studied.

NOTES

1. This study was supported in part by the Center for Urban Regionalism and the Office of Research, Kent State University. We are indebted to Claire Smith and Sue Schroeder for their assistance on this paper.

2. See for example. The Negro Family: A Case for National Action (Moynihan report) and E. Franklin Frazier The Negro Family in the United States. The University of Chicago Press. 1966.

3. Robert O. Blood and Donald M. Wolfe, Husbands and Wives, The Free Press, New York. 1960.

4. Ibid. p. 21.

5. Ibid. p. 25 and p. 35.

6. Ibid. p. 12.

TABLE I

DISTRIBUTION OF SCORES FOR HUSBANDS AND WIVES ON THE FAMILY DECISION MAKING SCALE - RESPONDENT'S FAMILY OF ORIENTATION

SCORES	HUSBANDS		WIVES	
	N	%	N	%
0-2.0	0	0	0	0
2.1-4.0	2	5	2	4
4.1-6.0	10	22	17	34
6.1-8.0	27	60	22	44
8.1-10.0	6	13	9	18
Totals (Individuals)	45	100	50	100

TABLE II

DISTRIBUTION OF SCORES ON THE FAMILY DECISION MAKING SCALE APPLIED TO THE RESPONDENT'S FAMILY OF ORIENTATION

SCORES	HUSBANDS		WIVES	
	N	%	N	%
0-2.0	4	9	9	18
2.1-4.0	2	5	2	4
4.1-6.0	11	24	13	26
6.1-8.0	17	38	16	32
8.1-10.0	11	24	10	20
Totals (Individuals)	45	100	50	100

TABLE III

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY AGE

Age	MEAN POWER SCORES Husbands N	Husbands $\bar{X}$	Wives N	Wives $\bar{X}$
25-44	13	6.57	23	6.65
45-64	17	6.83	19	6.98
65 and over	15	6.73	8	6.00
Totals (Individuals)	45		50	

TABLE IV

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY AGE DIFFERENCES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Age Differences	MEAN POWER SCORES Husbands N	Husbands X	Wives N	Wives X
Wife Older	3	7.50	3	6.50
Same Age	9	6.47	9	6.97
Husband Older	31	6.79	31	6.90
Totals (Families)	43		43	

TABLE V

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

	MEAN POWER SCORES			
	Husbands		Wives	
Level of Education	N	$\bar{X}$	N	$\bar{X}$
0-8 Years	20	6.85	13	6.75
9-11 Years	15	6.80	22	6.90
12 Years and over	9	6.79	15	6.70
Totals (Individuals)	45		50	

TABLE VI

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY DIFFERENTIALS IN LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

	MEAN POWER SCORES			
	Husbands		Wives	
Educational Level Differential	N	$\bar{X}$	N	$\bar{X}$
Wife more	25	6.87	25	6.36
Equal	3	6.83	3	7.56
Husband more	15	6.92	15	6.93
Totals (Families)	43		43	

TABLE VII

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY DEGREE OF RELIGIOUSITY*

Religiousity Score	MEAN POWER SCORES Husbands N	$\bar{X}$	Wives N	$\bar{X}$
5 and under	9	6.66	16	6.51
5.1-6.0	8	6.40	10	6.30
6.1-7.0	28	7.00	24	7.00
Totals (Individuals)	45		50	

*Religiousity was measured by using the scale developed by Snell Putney and Russell Middleton, "Rebellion, Conformity, and Parental Religious Ideologies," Sociometry, 24 (June, 1961), pp. 125-135. The range of the scale is from 1 to 7 with 7 being high.

TABLE VIII

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY RELIGIOUSITY SCORE DIFFERENTIALS

Religiousity score Differential	MEAN POWER SCORES Husbands N	$\bar{X}$	Wives N	$\bar{X}$
Wife more religious	13	6.44	13	6.95
Both same	12	7.00	12	6.71
Husband more religious	18	6.97	18	6.68
Totals (Families)	43		43	

TABLE IX

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY EMPLOYMENT

	MEAN POWER SCORES			
	Husbands		Wives	
Employment	N	$\bar{X}$	N	$\bar{X}$
Both Employed	15	6.80	15	6.15
Wife only employed (Husband Retired)	4	7.70	4	6.42
Husband only employed	17	6.83	17	7.59
Neither employed	7	6.71	7	6.30
Totals (Families)	43		43	

TABLE X

MEAN POWER SCORES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES BY ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME

	MEAN POWER SCORES			
	Husbands		Wives	
Annual Income	N	$\bar{X}$	N	$\bar{X}$
Less than 5000	16	6.91	21	6.61
5000-8,999	23	6.84	23	6.78
9,000 and over	6	6.75	6	6.46
Totals (Individuals)	45		50	